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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: SCENESETTER FOR WALID JUMBLATT'S
WASHINGTON VISIT

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

11. (S) In his upcoming visit to Washington, Walid Jumblatt will focus on obtaining USG support for the establishment of the international tribunal and for confronting Syrian and Lebanese opposition pressure on the government. He will be interested in discussing with Washington leaders possible outcomes to Lebanon's political crisis and will seek to boost his standing, and possibly his security, in Lebanon through a high-profile visit. Washington will have a chance to consult with Jumblatt and his well-connected colleagues on Lebanon's political currents, show support for the Siniora government, and pressure Jumblatt for economic reforms such in areas such as privatization and telecommunications. Jumblatt's Washington interlocutors should be aware of a few potential pitfalls arising from his visit and meetings. Jumblatt will spend a day in New York after his February 26-28 visit to Washington. He will be joined in his Washington and New York talks by Telecommunications Minister Marwan Hamade and by Saad Hariri advisor Dr. Ghattas Khoury. End Summary.

A COMPLICATED PAST

12. (C) Walid Jumblatt was born in 1949 in the Mukhtara mansion where he still lives in. Upon the assassination of his father, Kamal Jumblatt, in 1977, Walid inherited both the leadership of his father's Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and the leadership of most of Lebanon's Druse population. Jumblatt's hold on the PSP has never been in question, but his unofficial position as Druse leader has been mildly challenged since the 2005 Syrian departure from Lebanon by pro-Syrian rival Talal Arslan. Jumblatt appears to have beaten off the challenge for now, largely by outspending Arslan in gifts, favors and government jobs for Druse constituents. Jumblatt's key role as a member of the March 14 coalition majority has also buttressed his support among Druse.

13. (S) Dwindling of funds for the Council for the Displaced, an agency for spending in the Druse-dominated Chouf over which Jumblatt has held influence, has presented a modest challenge to Jumblatt's fortunes. In a recent meeting with the Ambassador Jumblatt acknowledged receiving a cash infusion of \$10 million from the Saudis, presumably in recognition of his support for the government of Sunni Prime

Minister Fouad Siniora. Most of that money will be used to maintain Jumblatt's feudal trappings at Mukhtara, his security apparatus, and the loyalty of thousands of followers.

¶4. (C) Despite his knowing that Damascus was responsible for the killing of his father, Jumblatt accepted Syrian sponsorship and support at various points during the Lebanese Civil War, in which he engaged in brutal fighting against present-day allies Amine Gemayel and Samir Geagea. Jumblatt supported the Syrian military presence in Lebanon during the 1990's, and served in the Syrian-dominated cabinets of Omar Karami, Rashid El-Solh, and Rafiq Hariri. Jumblatt began to stray from the Syrians after Hafez al-Asad's 2000 death, and became a staunch proponent of Lebanese independence after the attempted assassination of his friend and confidant Marwan Hamadeh in October 2004 and Hariri's assassination in February 2005.

¶5. (C) After Hizballah won elections to the Chamber of Deputies and came into the Siniora cabinet in 2005, Jumblatt increasingly began to differ with Hizballah over issues such as the international tribunal (of which he is a fervent supporter). Jumblatt has recently traded insults and accusations through the media with both Bashar al-Asad and Hassan Nasrallah, and is under an arrest warrant in Syria. Meanwhile, Jumblatt and Samir Geagea have assumed the role of March 14's hardliners, and are credited with stiffening Prime Minister Siniora's resolve since the March 8 opposition coalition began calling for his cabinet's dissolution in fall ¶2006. The two called for their followers to arm themselves and forcibly remove opposition roadblocks on January 23, which may have stopped the opposition demonstration and possibly prevented a takeover of the Grand Serail.

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¶6. (C) Despite a past filled with militia fighting and political strife, Jumblatt is a cultured intellectual, avid reader, committed environmentalist and world traveler. He is a shareholder in the (unprofitable) Kefraya vineyard and the Sibli cement factory, and is rumored (like most of Lebanon's faction leaders) to control a share of Lebanon's fuel imports. Jumblatt is a risk taker, sometimes traveling alone in an unarmored car, despite clear threats to his life. His first wife committed suicide and he adopted the sons with his second wife, Nora. He is believed to be grooming his eldest son, Timour, as his political heir.

JUMBLATT'S VISIT GOALS

¶7. (C) The International Tribunal: Jumblatt sees the establishment of the international tribunal as the key to ending the violent attacks that have plagued Lebanon for over two years. Marwan Hamadeh and Jumblatt are seeking a way for the GOL to move forward to establish the tribunal without the cooperation of President Lahoud or of Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, who has until now refused to convene a session to address the tribunal and adopt supporting legislation. They will push for strong statements of support from USG officials for the tribunal, and may push for a commitment to seek the establishment of the tribunal via a UNSC Chapter VII resolution should the efforts in Lebanon fail to establish the Tribunal.

¶8. (C) Syrian interference in Lebanon: Jumblatt and Hamadeh, along with former MP and Saad Hariri advisor Dr. Ghattas Khoury will accompany them, want to discuss how to counter Syrian pressure, which aims at paralyzing the government. He believes that much of the pressure on the government originates from Syria, acting through its friends, with the goal of changing certain terms of the statute for the Special Tribunal. Hamade told us that the visitors will want to discuss the future of UNSC Resolutions 1559, 1701, and the Tribunal in both Washington and New York.

¶9. (C) Political Pressures from Hizballah and the Opposition, including Hizballah Rearmament: Hizballah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah and his lieutenants have been increasingly vocal in insisting on opposition demands recently (such as the formation of a new Cabinet). Along with reluctant Hizballah ally and Amal leader Nabih Berri, they have hinted at that they would resort to civil disobedience if a political solution is not found soon. Meanwhile, Hizballah acknowledged that the arms shipment seized last week by the LAF, which many believe included weapons for street fighting in Beirut, in fact did belong to Hizballah, and threatened that "there will not be a (another) seizure" of Hizballah weapons. Jumblatt ally and Telecommunications Minister Hamade told us this week that the nature of these weapons indicated that they were for internal Lebanese use, rather than for potential attacks against Israel. Jumblatt recently told the press that he believes the opposition's tent city in central Beirut is part of a scheme to absorb LAF resources which might otherwise be used to stem arms smuggling. He is gravely concerned by what he sees as a drive by Hizballah to buy up properties in Beirut and in the Chouf to dominate strategic sites in Lebanon. Finally, he subscribes to a widespread view that Hizballah, Berri and their followers are either callous to or actively seeking the economic ruin of Lebanon's major industries, having little stake in these industries themselves, as a means of pressuring other groups and bolstering their relative position in society.

¶10. (C) The Presidency and what to do about Lahoud: President Lahoud's extended term ends in November 2007, and the Chamber of Deputies is supposed to elect his successor in September. As the September date approaches, in the absence of a solution, all parties expect Lebanon's political tension to intensify. Assuming that Parliament Speaker Berri will not permit a parliament session to elect a president who is not acceptable to the March 8 side and its Syrian backers, March 14 leaders will face a choice of two unpalatable options: either attempt to convene a session under the leadership of Deputy Speaker Farid Makari, or announce that the cabinet will govern alone without the parliament or the presidency. Jumblatt and his companions believe that this is

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provided for by the constitution, but realize that such a step would likely result in intensified pressure from and possibly armed conflict with the opposition and agents of Damascus.

¶11. (C) Security: One of Jumblatt's principal current preoccupations, despite his bravado, is his personal security. Some observers believe that Jumblatt's repeated accusations that Damascus and Hizballah are behind the wave of attacks in Lebanon since October 2004 are Jumblatt's way of deterring such an attack on him; by making himself such a clear target, Damascus and Hizballah should realize that they will be implicated should Jumblatt come to harm. Jumblatt may calculate that his visit to Washington, high-profile appearances and meetings with senior administration officials may serve to reduce the chance that his political enemies may seek to assassinate him.

OUR GOALS

¶12. (S) Hamadeh and Khoury Readout: Communications Minister and longtime Jumblatt ally Marwan Hamade and ex-MP, Hariri advisor Ghattas Khoury will accompany Jumblatt on his trip. Hamade has one of the keenest minds in Lebanese politics, and he is a key strategist at the center of March 14 decisionmaking who knows more about Lebanon's political conflict than perhaps any other. Khoury also serves on March 14's strategy committee and works to keep Saad Hariri rooted in the Lebanese political context. Hamade and Khoury can inform Washington policymakers of the latest in Lebanese political dynamics.

¶13. (C) Demonstrate Support for the Siniora Government: We should stress that our support for the GOL derives from our belief that it was brought to power democratically and legitimately and that it continues to enjoy constitutional legitimacy. Jumblatt may welcome a warm embrace from the USG, but the Prime Minister has told us that he is weakened by overzealous USG statements of support for him. Siniora then, occasionally, feels the need to lash out at Israel (or, as in a recent LA Times interview, at the USG) to reestablish his legitimacy with Lebanese who share Arab nationalist sentiments.

¶14. (C) Privatization and Telecom Reform: As Minister of Telecommunications, Hamade is aware that these issues are of special interest to us. After leading the region in the 1990's in the introduction of mobile phone and internet service, these sectors of what is otherwise a modern Lebanese economy have stagnated and are now several years out of date. The Siniora government has not done enough, quickly enough, to reform the telecommunications sector, although it has recently appointed a committee to address these issues. On privatization, there are several Lebanese state-owned companies that are ripe for sale. One of the biggest drags on state finances is Electricite du Liban (EDL), the loss-making electricity utility which, despite a USD 1 billion annual government subsidy, cannot supply constant and reliable power to its customers. While the GOL does not want to sell EDL until it can somehow return the company to a positive market value, some official privatization of the sector must be undertaken. (Unofficial privatization has already occurred, in that private suppliers have arisen to meet some of the country's unmet electricity needs.)

¶15. (C) Follow-up to Paris III: The DCM informed Hamade on February 23 that Washington will be especially interested in discussing conditionality on the USD 250 million cash grant, should Congress appropriate these funds. Discussions will have to focus on the distinction between infinite reform desiderata and what is politically possible, and the Lebanese visitors should help flesh this out for us.

WATCH OUT FOR

¶16. (S) Military Action/Regime Change in Syria: Like many March 14 leaders and their supporters, Jumblatt believes that a military threat or strike against Syria, or overthrowing the Asad regime, may be the only way to convince Damascus to stop its violent interference in Lebanon's affairs. Unlike

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some, though, Jumblatt believes such action should be undertaken in the near term, as the next step to solve Lebanon's political crisis. Jumblatt may attempt to convince policymakers of his point of view, and may advocate such actions in public while on his visit.

¶17. (S) USG Obstructing Settlement: The opposition is spreading rumors that the USG is working to scuttle a settlement to the Lebanese political conflict. Under this narrative, the USG opposes any deal crafted by the Saudis with Iran, and any deal that accommodates Syrian interests in Lebanon. Another theory goes that the USG is preventing a settlement in Lebanon, any settlement, either to serve an alleged Israeli interest in having Lebanon remain chaotic, or to ensure on Israel's behalf that a fellow Middle East minority, the Alawites, remains in power in Damascus. As March 14's most vocal and hardline supporters, Jumblatt and Samir Geagea have been singled out by the opposition as the principal tools of the alleged USG policy to obstruct a settlement in Lebanon, and Jumblatt's visit to Washington may strengthen that image.

¶18. (C) Ambassador Feltman's Departure: Jumblatt has enjoyed a very close relationship with the Ambassador and credits him with much of the success that Lebanon has achieved in

throwing off Syrian domination. Furthermore, he views with alarm the prospect that the end of the Ambassador's three-year tour here could either result in a diminishing of the USG commitment to Lebanon or in a propaganda victory for the opposition, which will claim that the Ambassador's departure represents the failure of "the American plot for Lebanon and the region" as the opposition press likes to put it. (The impending departure of French Ambassador Emie and of President Chirac will also be occasions for opposition triumphalism over the next few months.) Department officials may wish to reassure Jumblatt of the USG's enduring commitment to Lebanon, exemplified by our actions such as, most recently, at the Paris III Donors' Conference.

FELTMAN